

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

<b>THOMAS BARNDT,</b>	:	<b>CIVIL NO. 3:09-CV-1790</b>
	:	
<b>Plaintiff,</b>	:	<b>(Judge Caldwell)</b>
	:	
<b>v.</b>	:	
	:	<b>(Magistrate Judge Carlson)</b>
<b>PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT</b>	:	
<b>OF CORRECTIONS, et al.,</b>	:	
	:	
<b>Defendants,</b>	:	

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

**I. Statement of Facts and of the Case.**

This is a *pro se* civil rights action brought by Thomas Barndt, a state inmate who is currently confined at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) Graterford, and was previously housed at SCI Dallas. (Doc. 47.) Barndt has filed a complaint, which he amended on June 21, 2010, naming some sixteen correctional and prison medical staff as Defendants. (Id.)

The thrust of Barndt's amended complaint relates to medical treatment he has received in prison. In his amended complaint, Barndt alleges that he suffers from a host of maladies including Hepatitis C, an enlarged prostate and a hernia. Barndt then claims that the various Defendants' "deliberate indifference to plaintiff's serious medical needs violated plaintiff's rights, and constituted cruel and unusual punishment under the 8th and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments of the U.S. Constitution and plaintiff is entitled to

relief." (Id.) Specifically, according to Barndt, "[t]he PA DOC has refused to give Plaintiff Interferon and riberin Treatment for his 14 to 25 yr. old HEPATITUS [sic] C VIRUS since 1991 BY MAKING EXCUSES THAT HAVE NO VALIDITY. HEPATITUS [sic] C causes damage to Plaintiff's Liver and daily fatigue which makes Plaintiff sleep all night and most of morning.[The defendants] know[] about my serious needs and ha[ve] failed to respond reasonably to it. HEPATITUS [sic]C affects Plaintiff's daily activities because of the fatigue. Plaintiff has lost muscle mass and his gallbladder because of the Hepatitis [sic] C virus. A reasonable doctor or patient would consider Hepatitis [sic] C very worhty [sic] worthy of treatment." (Id.)(capitalization in original.) In particular, with respect to medical staff, Barndt alleges that health care providers violated his Eighth Amendment right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment, by displaying deliberate indifference to his serious medical needs.

While the focus of his complaint is on medical issues, Barndt has named 11 non-medical corrections Defendants in his amended complaint. These 11 Defendants include the Department of Corrections; the Secretary of the Department, Jeffrey Beard; seven correctional supervisors, whose only alleged wrongdoing seems to consist of failing to favorably respond to prior grievances lodged by Barndt;<sup>1</sup> and two

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<sup>1</sup>The Defendants are Defendants Wynder, Klopotoskie, Leskowsky, Watson, Bucks, Reisinger, and Kneiss..

correctional officers, Officers Walters and Wilk. As to Officers Will and Walters Barndt simply alleges that on unidentified dates these officers interfered in an unspecified ways with his access to health care.

These corrections Defendants now seek dismissal of the complaint at the outset of this litigation, arguing that Barndt's complaint, which relates to medical matters, fails to state a cause of action upon which relief can be granted as to these non-medical prison personnel. (Doc. 56.). This motion has been fully briefed by the parties (Docs. 62 and 67) and is now ripe for resolution. For the reasons set forth below, it is recommended that this motion to dismiss be granted.

## **II. Discussion**

### **A. Rule 12(b)(6)– The Legal Standard.**

The Defendants have filed a motion to dismiss this complaint under Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure provides that a complaint should be dismissed for “failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6). In addition, when reviewing *in forma pauperis* complaints, 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) specifically enjoins us to “dismiss the complaint at any time if the court determines that . . . the action . . . fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.”

With respect to this benchmark standard for legal sufficiency of a complaint, the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has recently aptly noted the evolving standards governing pleading practice in federal court, stating that:

Standards of pleading have been in the forefront of jurisprudence in recent years. Beginning with the Supreme Court's opinion in Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007) continuing with our opinion in Phillips [v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 230 (3d Cir. 2008)] and culminating recently with the Supreme Court's decision in Ashcroft v. Iqbal –U.S.–, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009) pleading standards have seemingly shifted from simple notice pleading to a more heightened form of pleading, requiring a plaintiff to plead more than the possibility of relief to survive a motion to dismiss.

Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside, 578 F.3d 203, 209-10 (3d Cir. 2009).

In considering whether a complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, the court must accept as true all allegations in the complaint and all reasonable inferences that can be drawn from the complaint are to be construed in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. Jordan v. Fox Rothschild, O'Brien & Frankel, Inc., 20 F.3d 1250, 1261 (3d Cir. 1994). However, a court “need not credit a complaint’s bald assertions or legal conclusions when deciding a motion to dismiss.” Morse v. Lower Merion Sch. Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). Additionally a court need not “assume that a ... plaintiff can prove facts that the ... plaintiff has not alleged.” Associated Gen. Contractors of Cal. v. California State Council of Carpenters, 459 U.S. 519, 526 (1983). As the Supreme Court held in Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007), in order to state a valid cause of action a

plaintiff must provide some factual grounds for relief which “requires more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of actions will not do.” Id. at 555. “Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level.” Id. In keeping with the principles of Twombly, the Supreme Court recently underscored that a trial court must assess whether a complaint states facts upon which relief can be granted when ruling on a motion to dismiss. In Ashcroft v. Iqbal, \_\_ U.S. \_\_, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009), the Supreme Court held that, when considering a motion to dismiss, a court should “begin by identifying pleadings that, because they are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth.” Id. at 1950. According to the Supreme Court, “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” Id. at 1949. Rather, in conducting a review of the adequacy of complaint, the Supreme Court has advised trial courts that they must:

[B]egin by identifying pleadings that because they are no more than conclusions are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations. When there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to relief.

Id. at 1950.

Thus, following Twombly and Iqbal a well-pleaded complaint must contain more than mere legal labels and conclusions. Rather, a complaint must recite factual allegations

sufficient to raise the plaintiff's claimed right to relief beyond the level of mere speculation. As the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has stated:

[A]fter Iqbal, when presented with a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim, district courts should conduct a two-part analysis. First, the factual and legal elements of a claim should be separated. The District Court must accept all of the complaint's well-pleaded facts as true, but may disregard any legal conclusions. Second, a District Court must then determine whether the facts alleged in the complaint are sufficient to show that the plaintiff has a "plausible claim for relief." In other words, a complaint must do more than allege the plaintiff's entitlement to relief. A complaint has to "show" such an entitlement with its facts.

Fowler, 578 F.3d at 210-11.

In our view, these heightened pleading standards apply to all aspects of the Court's threshold analysis of a complaint's legal sufficiency. Thus, we will apply this analysis both when assessing the adequacy of the factual assertions set forth in the complaint, and when examining whether a complaint states a viable cause of action.

**B. Legal Standards Governing Eighth Amendment "Deliberate Indifference" Claims in a Prison Medical Context.**

Liberally construed, the gravamen of Barndt's complaint is that prison officials have violated Barndt's rights under the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution by displaying "deliberate indifference" to this inmate's medical needs. Barndt faces an exacting burden in advancing this Eighth Amendment claim against

prison officials in their individual capacities. To sustain such a claim, Barndt must plead facts which:

[M]eet two requirements: (1) “the deprivation alleged must be, objectively, sufficiently serious;” and (2) the “prison official must have a sufficiently culpable state of mind.” Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 834, 114 S.Ct. 1970, 128 L.Ed.2d 811 (1994) (quotation marks and citations omitted). In prison conditions cases, “that state of mind is one of ‘deliberate indifference’ to inmate health or safety.” Id. “Deliberate indifference” is a subjective standard under Farmer—the prison official-defendant must actually have known or been aware of the excessive risk to inmate safety.

Beers-Capitol v. Whetzel, 256 F.3d 120, 125 (3d Cir. 2001).

By including a subjective intent component in this Eighth Amendment benchmark, the courts have held that a mere generalized knowledge that prisons are dangerous places does not give rise to an Eighth Amendment claim. See Jones v. Beard, 145 F. App’x 743 (3d Cir. 2005)(finding no Eighth Amendment violation where inmate-plaintiff complained about cellmate who had a history of psychological problems, but where plaintiff failed to articulate a specific threat of harm during the weeks prior to an attack.) In short, when “analyzing deliberate indifference, a court must determine whether the prison official ‘acted or failed to act despite his knowledge of a substantial risk of serious harm.’ Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 841 (1994). A prisoner plaintiff must prove that the prison official ‘knows of and disregards an excessive risk

to inmate health or safety.' Id. at 837." Garvey v. Martinez, 08-2217, 2010 WL 569852, at \*6 (M.D.Pa. Feb. 11, 2010).

These principles apply with particular force to Eighth Amendment claims premised upon inadequate medical care. In the medical context, a constitutional violation under the Eighth Amendment occurs only when state officials are deliberately indifferent to an inmate's serious medical needs. Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 105 (1976). To establish a violation of his constitutional right to adequate medical care in accordance with this standard, Barndt is required to allege facts that demonstrates (1) a serious medical need, and (2) acts or omissions by prison officials that indicate deliberate indifference to that need. Rouse v. Plantier, 182 F.3d 192, 197 (3d Cir. 1999).

Deliberate indifference to a serious medical need involves the "unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain." Estelle, 429 U.S. at 104. Such indifference may be evidenced by an intentional refusal to provide care, delayed provision of medical treatment for non-medical reasons, denial of prescribed medical treatment, denial of reasonable requests for treatment that results in suffering or risk of injury, Durmer v. O'Carroll, 991 F.2d 64, 68 (3d Cir. 1993), or "persistent conduct in the face of resultant pain and risk of permanent injury," White v. Napoleon, 897 F.2d 103, 109 (3d Cir. 1990).

However, it is also clear that the mere misdiagnosis of a condition or medical need, or negligent treatment provided for a condition, is not actionable as an Eighth Amendment claim because medical malpractice standing alone is not a constitutional violation. Estelle, 429 U.S. at 106. “Indeed, prison authorities are accorded considerable latitude in the diagnosis and treatment of prisoners.” Durmer, 991 F.2d at 67 (citations omitted). Furthermore, in a prison medical context, deliberate indifference is generally not found when some significant level of medical care has been offered to the inmate. Clark v. Doe, 2000 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 14999, 2000 WL 1522855, at \*2 (E.D.Pa. Oct. 13, 2000)(“courts have consistently rejected Eighth Amendment claims where an inmate has received some level of medical care”). Thus, such complaints fail as constitutional claims under § 1983 since “the exercise by a doctor of his professional judgment is never deliberate indifference. See e.g. Brown v. Borough of Chambersburg, 903 F.2d 274, 278 (3d Cir.1990) (‘[A]s long as a physician exercises professional judgment his behavior will not violate a prisoner's constitutional rights.’). Gindraw v. Dendler, 967 F.Supp. 833, 836 (E.D. Pa. 1997).

Applying this exacting standard, courts have frequently rejected Eighth Amendment claims that are based upon the level of professional care that an inmate received; see, e.g., Ham v. Greer, 269 F. App’x 149 (3d Cir. 2008); James v. Dep’t of Corrections, 230 F. App’x 195 (3d. Cir. 2007); Gillespie v. Hogan, 182 F. App’x 103

(3d Cir. 2006); Bronson v. White, No. 05-2150, 2007 WL 3033865 (M.D. Pa. Oct. 15, 2007); Gindraw v. Dendler, 967 F.Supp. 833 (E.D. Pa. 1997), particularly where it can be shown that significant medical services were provided to the inmate but the prisoner is dissatisfied with the outcome of these services. Instead, courts have defined the precise burden which an inmate must sustain in order to advance an Eighth Amendment claim against a healthcare professional premised on allegedly inadequate care, stating that:

The district court [may] properly dis[miss an] Eighth Amendment claim, as it concerned [a care giver], because [the] allegations merely amounted to a disagreement over the proper course of his treatment and thus failed to allege a reckless disregard with respect to his . . . care. The standard for cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment, established by the Supreme Court in Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976), and its progeny, has two prongs: 1) deliberate indifference by prison official and 2) serious medical needs. “It is well-settled that claims of negligence or medical malpractice, without some more culpable state of mind, do not constitute ‘deliberate indifference.’” “Nor does mere disagreement as to the proper medical treatment support a claim of an eighth amendment violation.” . . . [The inmate] alleged no undue delay in receiving treatment and, as the district court noted, the evidence he presented established that he received timely care . . . . Although [an inmate plaintiff] may have preferred a different course of treatment, [t]his preference alone cannot establish deliberate indifference as such second-guessing is not the province of the courts.

James, 230 F.App’x. at 197-198(citations omitted).

Furthermore, it is well-settled that an inmate’s dissatisfaction with a course of medical treatment, standing alone, does not give rise to a viable Eighth Amendment

claim. See Taylor v. Norris, 36 Fed. Appx. 228, 229 (8th Cir. 2002) (deliberate indifference claim failed when it boiled down to a disagreement over recommended treatment for hernias and decision not to schedule a doctor's appointment); Abdul-Wadood v. Nathan, 91 F.3d 1023, 1024-35 (7th Cir.1996) (inmate's disagreement with selection of medicine and therapy for sickle cell anemia falls well short of demonstrating deliberate indifference); Sherrer v. Stephen, 50 F.3d 496, 497 (8th Cir.1994) (inmate's "desire for a replacement joint instead of fusion surgery is merely a disagreement with the course of medical treatment and does not state a constitutional claim"); Kayser v. Caspari, 16 F.3d 280, 281 (8th Cir.1994) (prison provided escalating level of treatment for inmates's ailments over time, and inmate's disagreement with course of medical treatment was insufficient basis for Eighth Amendment violation); Czajka v. Caspari, 995 F.2d 870, 871 (8th Cir.1993) (inmate's mere disagreement with doctor's informed decision to delay surgery does not establish Eighth Amendment claim); Smith v. Marcantonio, 910 F.2d 500, 502 (8th Cir.1990) (inmate failed to prove deliberate indifference where his complaints represented nothing more than mere disagreement with course of his medical treatment); Lair v. Oglesby, 859 F.2d 605, 606 (8th Cir.1988) (disagreement about whether doctor should have prescribed medication does not result in constitutional violation); Martin v. Sargent, 780 F.2d 1334, 1339 (8th Cir.1985) (Inmate failed to state facts indicating doctor deliberately disregarded his medical problem; inmate's disagreement as to

proper medical treatment does not give rise to Eighth Amendment violation). Therefore, where a dispute in essence entails nothing more than a disagreement between an inmate and doctors over alternate treatment plans, the inmate's complaint will fail as a constitutional claim under § 1983; see e.g., Gause v. Diguglielmo, 339 F.App'x 132 (3d Cir. 2009)(dispute over choice of medication does not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation); Innis v. Wilson, 334 F.App'x 454 (3d Cir. 2009)(same); Rozzelle v. Rossi, 307 F.App'x 640 (3d Cir. 2008)(same); Whooten v. Bussanich, 248 F.App'x 324 (3d Cir. 2007)(same); Ascenzi v. Diaz, 247 F.App'x 390 (3d Cir. 2007)(same), since “the exercise by a doctor of his professional judgment is never deliberate indifference.” Gindraw v. Dendler, 967 F.Supp. 833, 836 (E.D. Pa. 1997)(citations omitted). In short, in the context of the Eighth Amendment, any attempt to second-guess the propriety or adequacy of a particular course of treatment is disavowed by courts since such determinations remain a question of sound professional medical judgment. Inmates of Allegheny County Jail v. Pierce, 612 F.2d 754, 762 (3d Cir. 1979) (quoting Bowring v. Godwin, 551 F.2d 44, 48 (4th Cir. 1977)).

There is a necessary corollary to this principle, limiting the reach of the Eighth Amendment in a prison medical setting. In a case such as this, where the plaintiff's complaint reflects that an inmate received some level of on-going medical care, it is

also well-established that non-medical correctional staff may not be “considered deliberately indifferent simply because they failed to respond directly to the medical complaints of a prisoner who was already being treated by the prison doctor.” Durmer v. O'Carroll, 991 F.2d 64, 69 (3d. Cir. 1993). The rationale for this rule has been aptly explained by the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in the following terms:

If a prisoner is under the care of medical experts . . . , a non-medical prison official will generally be justified in believing that the prisoner is in capable hands. This follows naturally from the division of labor within a prison. Inmate health and safety is promoted by dividing responsibility for various aspects of inmate life among guards, administrators, physicians, and so on. Holding a non-medical prison official liable in a case where a prisoner was under a physician's care would strain this division of labor. Moreover, under such a regime, non-medical officials could even have a perverse incentive *not* to delegate treatment responsibility to the very physicians most likely to be able to help prisoners, for fear of vicarious liability. Accordingly, we conclude that, absent a reason to believe (or actual knowledge) that prison doctors or their assistants are mistreating (or not treating) a prisoner, a non-medical prison official . . . will not be chargeable with the Eighth Amendment scienter requirement of deliberate indifference

Spruill v. Gillis, 372 F.3d 218, 236 (3d. Cir. 2004).

Applying this standard, courts have repeatedly held that, absent some reason to believe that prison medical staff are mistreating prisoners, non-medical corrections staff who refer inmate medical complaints to physicians may not be held personally liable for medically-based Eighth Amendment claims. See, e.g., Johnson v. Doughty,

433 F.3d 1001 (7th Cir. 2006); Spruill v. Gillis, supra; Durmer v. O'Connor, supra; Garvey v. Martinez, No. 08-2217, 2010 WL 569852 (M.D. Pa. Feb. 11, 2010); Hodge v. United States. No. 06-1622, 2007 WL 2571938 (M.D. Pa. Aug. 31, 2007). This rule applies specifically to those prison staff whose involvement in a medical matter consists solely of examining, reviewing and addressing an inmate grievance concerning medical issues. Where non-medical corrections staff simply review a grievance, and refer an inmate to medical personnel, it is clear that “merely responding to or reviewing an inmate grievance does not rise to the level of personal involvement necessary to allege an Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference claim.” Garvey v. Martinez, 2010 WL 569852, 7 (M.D.Pa. Feb. 11, 2010)(citations omitted); see Johnson v. Doughty, 433 F.3d 1001 (7th Cir. 2006).

Moreover, a claim of a constitutional deprivation cannot be premised merely on the fact that the named defendant was the prison warden, or a prison supervisor, when the incidents set forth in the complaint occurred. Quite the contrary, to state a claim under §1983, the plaintiff must show that the supervisory defendants, acting under color of state law, deprived him of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States. 42 U.S.C. §1983; Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d 902 (3d Cir. 1997); see also Maine v. Thiboutot, 448 U.S. 1 (1980). Liability under § 1983 is personal in nature and can only follow personal involvement in the alleged wrongful

conduct shown through specific allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence in the challenged practice. Robinson v. City of Pittsburgh, 120 F.3d 1286 (3d Cir. 1997).

In particular, with respect to prison supervisors it is well-established that:

“A[n individual government] defendant in a civil rights action must have personal involvement in the alleged wrongdoing; liability cannot be predicated solely on the operation of respondeat superior. Personal involvement can be shown through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence.” Rode v. Dellarciprete, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir.1988).

Evanko v. Fisher, 423 F.3d 347, 353 (3d Cir. 2005).

In addition, to the extent that an inmate seeks to hold prison officials personally liable based solely upon the fact that these officials ruled against him in the course of prison disciplinary proceedings, it is well-established that inmates do not have a constitutional right to a prison grievance system. See Jones, 433 U.S. at 137-138; Speight v. Sims, No. 08-2038, 283 Fed. Appx. 880, 2008 WL 2600723 at \*1 (3d. Cir. June 30, 2008) (citing Massey v. Helman, 259 F.3d 641, 647 (7th Cir. 2001) (“[T]he existence of a prison grievance procedure confers no liberty interest on a prisoner.”)). Consequently, dissatisfaction with response to an inmate’s grievances does not support a constitutional claim. See also Alexander v. Gennarini, 144 Fed. Appx. 924 (3d Cir. 2005) (involvement in post-incident grievance process not a basis for § 1983 liability); Pryor-El v. Kelly, 892 F. Supp. 261, 275 (D. D.C. 1995) (because prison grievance

procedure does not confer any substantive constitutional rights upon prison inmates, the prison officials' failure to comply with grievance procedure is not actionable). See also Cole v. Sobina, No. 04-99J, 2007 WL 4460617, at \*5 (W.D. Pa. Dec. 19, 2007) ("[M]ere concurrence in a prison administrative appeal process does not implicate a constitutional concern.").

Finally, to the extent that an inmate seeks to name a state agency as a civil rights defendant, that complaint will also run afoul of basic constitutional and statutory rules limiting lawsuits against state agencies and officials. First, as a matter of constitutional law, the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution provides that "[t]he Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the . . . States . . .", U. S. Const. amend XI. By its terms, the Eleventh Amendment strictly limits the power of federal courts to entertain cases brought by citizens against the state and state agencies. Will v. Michigan Dept. of State Police, 491 U.S. 58 (1989).

Pursuant to the Eleventh Amendment, states, state agencies and state officials who are sued in their official capacity are generally immune from lawsuits in federal courts brought against them by citizens. Seminole Tribe v. Florida, 517 U.S. 44, 54 (1996). The constitutional protections afforded to the states and the state court system under the Eleventh Amendment also expressly apply to the state agencies that are integral parts of Pennsylvania's unitary court system. Absent an express waiver of the

immunity established by the Eleventh Amendment, all of these agencies, and their employees who are sued in their official capacities, are absolutely immune from lawsuits in federal court. Moreover as a matter of statutory interpretation, the plaintiff cannot bring a damages action against these state agencies or state officials in their official capacity since it is well-settled that a state, a state agency, or a state official acting in an official capacity is not a “person” within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. §1983.

Will v. Michigan Dep’t. of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989).

**C. Barndt’s Claims Against the Non-Medical Corrections Defendants Fail**

**1. Sovereign Immunity Precludes Barndt From Maintaining a Claim Against the State**

These basic legal tenets compel dismissal of Barndt’s claims against the non-medical corrections Defendants in this matter. At the outset, Barndt’s complaint against the state Department of Corrections fails as a substantive matter because it also runs afoul of basic constitutional and statutory rules limiting lawsuits against state agencies and officials. As a matter of constitutional law, the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution provides that “[t]he Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the . . . States . . . .”, U. S. Const. amend XI. By its terms, the Eleventh Amendment strictly limits the power of federal courts to entertain cases brought by citizens against the state and state agencies. In this case, with respect to Barndt’s claims, it is apparent

that Congress has not expressly abrogated the constitutional immunity of any of these state agencies and officials with respect to federal lawsuits. Moreover, the Commonwealth clearly has not waived this immunity. Quite the contrary, the Commonwealth has specifically by statute invoked its Eleventh Amendment immunity in 42 Pa.C.S.A. §8521(b). While Pennsylvania has, by law, waived sovereign immunity in limited categories of cases brought against the Commonwealth in state court, see 42 Pa.C.S.A. §8522, Section 8521(b) flatly states that: “Nothing contained in this subchapter shall be construed to waive the immunity of the Commonwealth from suit in federal courts guaranteed by the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.” 42 Pa.C.S.A. §8521(b).

Furthermore, as a matter of statutory interpretation, Barndt cannot rely upon § 1983 to bring a damages action against this state agency in its official capacity since it is well-settled that a state, a state agency, or a state official acting in an official capacity is not a “person” within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. §1983. Will v. Michigan Dep’t. of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989). Therefore both as a matter of statutory interpretation, and by virtue of the immunity conferred upon the states by the Eleventh Amendment, Barndt is forbidden from maintaining this action against the state agency named in his complaint to the extent that agency is sued in its official capacity under § 1983. See, e.g., Quern v. Jordan, 440 U.S. 332, 342 (1979); Edelman v. Jordan, 415

U.S. 651, 663 (1974); Benn v. First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, 426 F.3d 233 (3d Cir. 2005).

**2. Barndt's Complaint Fails to State a Cause of Action Against Prison Officials Based Solely Upon *Respondeat Superior* or Their Actions With Respect to His Grievances**

Neither can Barndt maintain a civil rights claim against non-medical corrections staff based solely upon *respondeat superior* or their actions with respect to past grievances which he has lodged. As to such claims, the law is clear. None of the grounds proffered by Barndt in support of this complaint justify holding these particular Defendants personally liable for the alleged constitutional violations set forth in the complaint. At the outset, the bald assertion that these supervisory Defendants at the prison should have known of his problems is plainly inadequate to establish personal liability here. Indeed, this type of claim, which is in essence nothing more than an assertion of *respondeat superior* liability, has been expressly rejected by the courts, which have held that correctional supervisors in a civil rights action must have personal involvement in the alleged wrongdoing. Thus, liability cannot be predicated solely on the operation of *respondeat superior*. Instead, personal involvement can only be shown through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence. Rode v. Dellarciprete, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir.1988).

Nor can Barndt sustain this claim against supervisory, non-medical correctional officials by simply pointing to the actions taken by these officials on various grievances which he filed following the period when he alleges that he received inadequate medical treatment. It is well-settled that inmates do not have a constitutional right to a prison grievance system. See Speight v. Sims, No. 08-2038, 283 Fed. Appx. 880, 2008 WL 2600723 at \*1 (3d. Cir. June 30, 2008) (citing Massey v. Helman, 259 F.3d 641, 647 (7th Cir. 2001) (“[T]he existence of a prison grievance procedure confers no liberty interest on a prisoner.”)). Consequently, dissatisfaction with response to an inmate’s grievances does not support a constitutional claim. See also Alexander v. Gennarini, 144 F. App’x 924 (3d Cir. 2005) (involvement in post-incident grievance process not a basis for § 1983 liability); Pryor-El v. Kelly, 892 F. Supp. 261, 275 (D. D.C. 1995) (because prison grievance procedure does not confer any substantive constitutional rights upon prison inmates, the prison officials’ failure to comply with grievance procedure is not actionable). See also Cole v. Sobina, No. 04-99J, 2007 WL 4460617, at \*5 (W.D. Pa. Dec. 19, 2007) (“[M]ere concurrence in a prison administrative appeal process does not implicate a constitutional concern.”)).

This principle applies with particular force to medical complaints like those raised here. In a case such as this, where the grieving inmate’s complaints reflect that the prisoner is receiving some level of on-going medical care, non-medical correctional staff will not be “considered deliberately indifferent simply because they

failed to respond directly to the medical complaints of a prisoner who was already being treated by the prison doctor.” Durmer v. O'Carroll, 991 F.2d 64, 69 (3d Cir. 1993), since:

If a prisoner is under the care of medical experts . . . , a non-medical prison official will generally be justified in believing that the prisoner is in capable hands. This follows naturally from the division of labor within a prison. Inmate health and safety is promoted by dividing responsibility for various aspects of inmate life among guards, administrators, physicians, and so on. Holding a non-medical prison official liable in a case where a prisoner was under a physician's care would strain this division of labor. Moreover, under such a regime, non-medical officials could even have a perverse incentive *not* to delegate treatment responsibility to the very physicians most likely to be able to help prisoners, for fear of vicarious liability. Accordingly, we conclude that, absent a reason to believe (or actual knowledge) that prison doctors or their assistants are mistreating (or not treating) a prisoner, a non-medical prison official . . . will not be chargeable with the Eighth Amendment scienter requirement of deliberate indifference

Spruill v. Gillis, 372 F.3d 218, 236 (3d Cir. 2004).

Applying this standard, courts have repeatedly held that, absent some reason to believe that prison medical staff are mistreating prisoners, non-medical corrections staff who refer inmate medical complaints to physicians may not be held personally liable for medically-based Eighth Amendment claims. See, e.g., Johnson v. Doughty, 433 F.3d 1001 (7th Cir. 2006); Spruill v. Gillis, supra; Durmer v. O'Connor, supra; Garvey v. Martinez, No. 08-2217, 2010 WL 569852 (M.D. Pa. Feb. 11, 2010); Hodge v. United States, No. 06-1622, 2007 WL 2571938 (M.D. Pa. Aug. 31, 2007); Flanyak v. Hopta, 410 F.Supp.2d 394 (M.D. Pa. 2006). Furthermore, when non-medical

corrections staff simply review a grievance, and refer an inmate to medical personnel, it is clear that “merely responding to or reviewing an inmate grievance does not rise to the level of personal involvement necessary to allege an Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference claim.” Garvey v. Martinez, 2010 WL 569852, at \*7 (M.D.Pa. Feb. 11, 2010)(citations omitted); see Johnson v. Doughty, 433 F.3d 1001 (7th Cir. 2006).

In this case, a review of Barndt’s complaint reveals that it is explicitly premised on the alleged failure of supervisors to act favorably upon his grievances. However, it appears that the non-medical corrections supervisors and grievance staff acted appropriately by deferring to medical staff for medical judgments regarding Barndt’s medical needs. Therefore, the conduct of these corrections Defendants cannot give rise to personal liability, and Barndt’s complaint against these Defendants should be dismissed. See, e.g., Johnson v. Doughty, 433 F.3d 1001 (7th Cir. 2006); Spruill v. Gillis, supra; Durmer v. O’Connor, supra; Garvey v. Martinez, No. 08-2217, 2010 WL 569852 (M.D. Pa. Feb. 11, 2010); Hodge v. United States. No. 06-1622, 2007 WL 2571938 (M.D. Pa. Aug. 31, 2007).

### **3. Barndt’s Complaints Against Other Corrections Defendants Are Inadequate**

Finally, as to at least three Defendants—Deputy Superintendent Kneiss, Officer Walters and Officer Wilk—the complaint violates the pleadings rules prescribed by the

United States Supreme Court in Ashcroft v. Iqbal, \_\_\_ U.S. \_\_\_, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009) in that it only contains “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” Id. at 1949. As to these Defendants Barndt simply alleges that on unidentified dates, in unspecified ways, they interfered with his medical treatment. Barndt does not assert sufficient facts to permit us to determine whether the allegations in the complaint show that the Plaintiff has a “plausible claim for relief.” Fowler, 578 F.3d at 210-11. Without the inclusion some well-pleaded facts, these assertions are plainly inadequate to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

We recognize that in civil rights cases *pro se* plaintiffs often should be afforded an opportunity to amend a complaint before the complaint is dismissed in its entirety, See Fletcher-Hardee Corp. v. Pote Concrete Contractors, 482 F.3d 247, 253 (3d Cir. 2007), unless granting further leave to amend would be futile or result in undue delay. Alston v. Parker, 363 F.3d 229, 235 (3d Cir. 2004). While Barndt’s allegations as to these Defendants are presently inadequate, it is recommended that the dismissal of these claims be without prejudice so that Barndt may endeavor to amend his complaint, if he can, to properly allege sufficient facts to show that the Plaintiff has a “plausible claim for relief” against these Defendants. Fowler, 578 F.3d at 210-11.

### **III. Recommendation**

Accordingly, for the foregoing reasons, IT IS RECOMMENDED that the Defendants' Motion to Dismiss be GRANTED as to Defendants Department of Corrections, Beard, Wynder, Klopotoskie, Leskowsky, Watson, Bucks, Reisinger, Kneiss, Walters and Wilk.

The parties are further placed on notice that pursuant to Local Rule 72.3:

Any party may object to a magistrate judge's proposed findings, recommendations or report addressing a motion or matter described in 28 U.S.C. § 636 (b)(1)(B) or making a recommendation for the disposition of a prisoner case or a habeas corpus petition within fourteen (14) days after being served with a copy thereof. Such party shall file with the clerk of court, and serve on the magistrate judge and all parties, written objections which shall specifically identify the portions of the proposed findings, recommendations or report to which objection is made and the basis for such objections. The briefing requirements set forth in Local Rule 72.2 shall apply. A judge shall make a de novo determination of those portions of the report or specified proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made and may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the magistrate judge. The judge, however, need conduct a new hearing only in his or her discretion or where required by law, and may consider the record developed before the magistrate judge, making his or her own determination on the basis of that record. The judge may also receive further evidence, recall witnesses or recommit the matter to the magistrate judge with instructions.

*S/Martin C. Carlson*

Martin C. Carlson  
United States Magistrate Judge

Dated: September 8, 2010